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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the effects of male versus female deviants on the small discussion group. One hundred undergraduates were assigned to 25 discussion groups, with two male students and two female students in each group. They were presented with a decision-making task, which was presented to group members as an exercise in consensus. They were to reach a decision on which all members could agree as quickly as possible. Ten groups were male deviant groups, ten were female deviant groups, and five were control groups. In the deviant conditions, one person was selected to receive instructions informing them that they should prevent the group from reaching a consensus. Response by group members on post-discussion questionnaires were analyzed to determine the influence of male and female deviants on four dependent variables: group cohesiveness, consensus, member satisfaction, and feelings of disruption. The results of the study supported the theory that consistently deviant behavior will negatively affect a group's ability to reach consensus and its internal sense of cohesiveness. However, female deviant behavior affected these goals less negatively than male deviant behavior. The findings relating male and female deviance to member satifaction and feelings of disruption are inconclusive. (MKM)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF MALE AND FEMALE DEVIANCE TO MEMBER PERCEPTIONS OF GROUP OUTCOME

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Research into the behavior of the deviant group member has examined the pressures to conformity exerted by majority group members. The results have shown that these pressures may be extremely persuasive, and that the ability of the individual to withstand these pressures is minimized over time. One of the most consistent research findings has been that females tend to conform to group pressures more than males.[1] Reitan and Shaw, for example, found that females conformed more to group pressure in all situations of the study, but their conformity behavior was most frequent in mixed groups and was characterized by concern over disagreements, desire to avoid conflict, and less confidence in the accuracy of their own judgments.[2] More recently, Sistrunk and McDavid have also published results which indicate that females are more susceptible to group pressure, but they warn against attributing the entire explanation to "cultural role prescription," claiming that most of the variance "may be accounted for by factors of person, task, and situation."[3]

In studies of communication behavior in groups with deviant members, Taylor and Bradley have also found sex differences. Taylor discovered that male members of the majority tended to be more hostile, dominant, and unreasonable than females, and that females were more dominant in their communication behavior when addressing other majority members than when addressing the deviant member.[4] Bradley found that, in the deviant role, males exceeded females in levels of dominance exhibited.[5]

These studies have extensively investigated the behavior of deviant group members as well as the pressures exerted by majority members. The results suggest that males will deviate more than females when they both find themselves in the role of a deviant, and that the female will most likely ultimately conform to the group position. Deviance, however, may be carried on through the life of the group, and certain distinctive effects of that deviance may be perceived on the group's problem-solving efforts. Research at this point has supplied us with incomplete answers as to what these effects might be. Will the outcome of the group be any different with male than with female deviants? That is, given the same opportunity to deviate, will a male deviant have more negative effects than a female deviant on members' perceptions of the group outcome?

The present study was designed to investigate the effects of male versus female deviants on the small discussion group. More specifically, responses by group members on post-discussion questionnaires were analyzed to determine the influence of male and female deviants on four dependent variables: group cohesiveness, consensus, member satisfaction, and feelings of disruption.

PROCEDURE

One hundred undergraduate students from the basic Speech Communication course at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University were selected as subjects for the experiment at the beginning of the winter quarter, January, 1975. They were assigned to twenty-five discussion groups, with two male students and two female students in each group. They were presented with a decision-making task which is familiar to many instructors of Discussion and Interpersonal Communication courses.

They were to choose, as a group, the one individual from a list of seven castaways (the captain of the yacht, a U.S. Senator, a grandmother, a young doctor, an artist, a university philosophy professor, and a prominent religious leader) who should be saved. The investigator explained to the members that this was an exercise in consensus. They were to reach a decision on which all members could agree and they were instructed to reach the decision as quickly as possible. Each member was given a sheet which explained the survivor problem. The investigator instructed the group to begin, he left the room, and he returned in twenty minutes to administer a questionnaire.

Ten groups were male deviant groups, ten were female deviant groups, and five were control groups. In the deviant conditions, either one male or one female was selected to receive special instructions. The bottom of their sheet contained the following special message: "Do not let anyone in your group know that you have received these instructions! Your task is to keep this group from reaching consensus. As soon as they seem to be settling on one person, take someone else and do not let them change your mind. In other words, do all you can to prevent the group from reaching a decision." All other members, plus all members in the control groups, received the same sheet without the special instructions.

The questionnaire administered at the conclusion of the discussion was designed to measure the individual group member's perceptions of the four variables, and it consisted of seven-point rating scales. For the first scale, cohesiveness was defined as the "ability of group members to get along, the feeling of loyalty and pride of members toward the group. It could also be defined as the degree of liking that members

have for each other." The students were instructed to rate how cohesive they thought their groups were, from one ("not cohesive at all") to seven ("very cohesive"). The second scale called for the respondent to rate the extent to which the group came to an agreement over the issue being discussed, from one ("there was no agreement; everyone was 'miles' apart") to seven ("I believe everyone was in total agreement"). The third scale was a measure of satisfaction with the decision-making process of the group, from one ("totally dissatisfied") to seven ("totally satisfied"). The final scale instructions were as follows: "Choose one person from your group other than yourself who you feel was the least agreeable member. Rate below how much you believe that person disrupted your group" (one = "none," seven = "a tremendous disruption"). The t-test was used to analyze differences in means for each of three comparisons on four dependent variables.

RESULTS

The results of this study are summarized in Tables 1 - 4. Of twelve total comparisons of means, significant differences were found for ten. As expected, every comparison between the control group mean and the deviant group mean involved a significant difference. Members of control groups which contained no assigned deviants rated their level of cohesiveness, consensus, and satisfaction significantly higher than did members of groups with either male or female deviants. In addition, scores on disruption were significantly lower for control groups than either male or female deviant group scores.

Significant differences were found on two of the four comparisons of male versus female deviance. Participants in groups with a male

deviant rated their group as significantly less cohesive and farther from consensus than did participants in groups with a female deviant. There were no differences between male and female deviant groups on ratings of satisfaction and disruption.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the member in a group with a male deviant is less likely, after discussion, to perceive his or her group as consensual and cohesive than a similar member of a group with a female deviant. According to the observations of the participants at the conclusion of discussion, groups with male deviants were farther from cohesiveness and consensus than groups with female deviants. Apparently male deviance works more actively toward hindering cohesiveness and consensus than does female deviance.

Partial explanation must continue to reside in the cultural bias that rewards males for assertiveness and females for submissiveness. Given equal instructions to behave as deviants in a group, females may be less than willing to deviate and males may, in general, feel strongly motivated to deviate as fully as possible. On the other hand, the extent of deviance exerted by both males and females may not be significantly different; rather, the degree that this deviance is perceived by other group members may differ depending on the sex of the source. That is, deviance which originates from a male group member may be taken more seriously than an equal expression of deviance from a female group member. A challenging direction for future research, therefore, is to determine whether male deviants do behave in a more deviant manner than female deviants or whether they are merely perceived to be more deviant. Sex

differences do alter the effects of deviant behavior, either as a function of the deviant's acts or as a function of the majority group member's perceptions of the deviant.

There were no differences between male and female deviant groups on ratings of satisfaction, even though the female deviant conditions registered higher levels of cohesiveness and consensus. This conflicts with the assumption that a group which had more success in achieving feelings of cohesiveness and in reaching agreement would also express higher satisfaction with the decision-making process of the group. The reason may simply be that the extent of a member's satisfaction with the group may be a function of other less obvious factors than the ability to achieve cohesiveness or reach consensus. Guetzkow and Gyr, in fact, found a correlation of only .46 between consensus and satisfaction.[6] Additional research is required to locate the ingredients for a satisfying group experience from the point of view of the individual participant.

The failure to find differences between male and female deviant groups on ratings of disruption may also be due to the bipolar nature of the disruption concept. The ratings tended to cluster around the lower end of the scale, and no one of the subjects was willing to rate the level of disruption effected by their deviant as a seven, even though this extreme showed up on the cohesiveness and consensus variables. Had the subjects been more willing to use the full range of the rating scale, sex differences may have been detected.

In spite of possible error associated with the use of self-report measures such as the ones in this study, the need still exists for rigorous examination of factors contributing to positive group member feelings. If a member's feelings of uniformity, liking, and satisfaction with the

other group members enable him or her to be a more active and effective participant, then we must determine what contributes to those feelings. At least, if certain situations and behaviors significantly minimize such feelings, we will know to avoid them. Future research will be carried out with this experimental data in order to conduct additional analyses of the group communication. Content analysis of the proceedings of the discussions should provide insight into the question of actual and perceived differences in male and female deviance behavior. The overall goals of this research call for examining the reactions of group members to male and female deviants and for evaluating the effects of male and female deviance on message content and member relationships.[7] These preliminary results indicate distinct differences between perceptions of group outcomes based on male versus female deviance behavior.

In summary, this study supports the general notion that deviant group behavior has critical effects upon the individual member's feelings of the group's success in achieving cohesiveness and consensus. More specifically, consistently deviant behavior will negatively affect a group's ability to reach consensus and its internal sense of cohesiveness, but there is evidence to suggest that female deviance behavior will affect these goals less negatively than will male deviance behavior. The findings relating male and female deviance to member satisfaction and feelings of disruption are inconclusive.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Karl F. Robinson, "An Experimental Study of the Effects of Group Discussion Upon the Social Attitudes of College Students," Speech Monographs, 8 (1941), 34-57; Read D. Tuddenham, "The Influence of a Distorted Group Norm Upon Individual Judgment," Journal of Psychology, 46 (1958), 227-241; H. Beloff, "Two Forms of Social Conformity: Acquiescence and Conventionality," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 57 (1958), 120-122; William C. Carrigan and James W. Julian, "Sex and Birth-Order Differences in Conformity as a Function of Need Affiliation Arousal," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3 (1966), 479-483; and Walter R. Nord, "Social Exchange Theory: An Integrative Approach to Social Conformity," Psychological Bulletin, 71 (1969), 174-208.

2. Harold T. Reitan and Marvin E. Shaw, "Group Membership, Sex-Composition of the Group, and Conformity Behavior," Journal of Social Psychology, 64 (1964), 45-51.

3. Frank Sistrunk and John W. McDavid, "Sex Variable in Conforming Behavior," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 17 (1971), 200-207.

4. K. Phillip Taylor, "An Investigation of Majority Verbal Behavior Toward Opinions of Deviant Members in Group Discussions of Policy," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1969).

5. Patricia A. Bradley, "An Experimental Study of Deviate Responses to Pressure for Uniformity in Group Discussion of Policy," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1974).

6. Harold Guetzkow and John Gyr, "An Analysis of Conflict in Decision-Making Groups," Human Relations, 7 (1954), 371.

7. The additional analysis of the data in this experiment is part of a comprehensive research project conducted by this writer and Professor John E. Baird of The University of Michigan.

TABLE 1

T-TEST COMPARISONS AMONG THE MEAN SCORES FOR COHESIVENESS

Control Groups n = 20 $\bar{X}$ = 6.00	Female Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 5.30	Male Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 4.53

	$\bar{X}$ Difference	t Value
Control v. Male	1.47	4.37 ***
Control v. Female	.70	15.95 ***
Male v. Female	.77	2.34 *

*** $p < .001$
* $p < .05$

TABLE 2

T-TEST COMPARISONS AMONG THE MEAN SCORES FOR CONSENSUS

Control Groups n = 20 $\bar{X}$ = 6.15	Female Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 5.20	Male Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 4.13

	$\bar{X}$ Difference	t Value
Control v. Male	2.02	5.26 ***
Control v. Female	.95	14.56 ***
Male v. Female	1.07	3.01 **

*** $p < .001$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 3

T-TEST COMPARISONS AMONG THE MEAN SCORES FOR SATISFACTION

Control Groups n = 20 $\bar{X}$ = 6.20	Female Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 5.20	Male Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 5.00

	$\bar{X}$ Difference	t Value
Control v. Male	1.20	16.67 ***
Control v. Female	1.00	14.29 ***
Male v. Female	.20	.57

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 4

T-TEST COMPARISONS AMONG THE MEAN SCORES FOR DISRUPTION

Control Groups n = 20 $\bar{X}$ = 2.20	Female Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 3.23	Male Deviant Groups n = 30 $\bar{X}$ = 3.53

	$\bar{X}$ Difference	t Value
Control v. Male	1.33	13.06 ***
Control v. Female	1.03	11.16 ***
Male v. Female	.30	.69

*** $p < .001$